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United Nations: Call to nominate independent and qualified candidates for the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Nine out of 18 members of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the Committee) will be elected in April 2008. The deadline for nominations of candidates is set for 12 February.

The effectiveness and efficiency of the Committee depends on the election of independent and highly qualified members with strong commitment to human rights.

The quality of Committee's monitoring of states parties' fulfilment of their obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights depends primarily on the Committee's membership. Similarly, the credibility of the Committee as independent and impartial body is a reflection of its membership.

Amnesty International welcomes the efforts of those states that have already identified and nominated independent, impartial and highly-qualified candidates for the election. However, the organization is concerned that, as of today, the Committee's website mentions only eight nominations. In the interest of ensuring that the Committee membership includes a broad range of expertise and experience, it is important that there be a large pool of qualified candidates from which to choose. The process for attracting and selecting candidates must be open, transparent and fair.

Amnesty International calls on all states parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) to take the following steps:

- o Make every effort to identify and nominate independent and highly qualified candidates.
- o In selecting the candidate, take full account of the criteria established in ECOSOC resolution 1985/17, namely members "shall be experts with recognized competence in the field of human rights, serving in their personal capacity."
- o Refrain from nominating candidates who hold positions in the executive or administrative branch of government and who are in, or appear to be in, a conflict of interest with the work of the Committee.
- o Actively involve civil society organizations to participate in the nominations process, including by assisting states in obtaining applications from highly qualified candidates and providing information on how the applicants meet the requirements of the post.
- o Make a detailed and public statement on how the selected candidate meets the criteria of independence, impartiality and expertise.
- o Refrain from nominating candidates who have already completed two consecutive terms on the Committee.

Finally, election on the basis of merit implies that 'vote trading' should be excluded. Amnesty International appeals to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) member states to cast their

votes solely on the basis of a candidate's independence, skills and expertise and her/his commitment to contribute to the protection and promotion of human rights.

Background

The Committee on Social Economic and Cultural Rights is made up of 18 members who are mandated to monitor states parties' implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The term of service of half of the current members of the Committee expires on 31 December 2008. All states parties to the ICESCR are entitled to nominate candidates. Members are then elected by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) by secret ballot. Elections are scheduled to take place at the end of April 2008 in New York - the deadline for member states to nominate candidates is 12 February.

To ensure equitable geographical distributions, ECOSOC has established that seats of the Committee are allocated on the basis of UN regional groupings. For the forthcoming elections, the African group, the Asian group, the group of Western and Other States and the Eastern European group have two seats each, while the group of Latin American and Caribbean States has one seat.

For updates on the forthcoming elections and information on the nominees, please consult <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/elections.htm>.

Public Document

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